

Shared Trauma Buddies by ladybug114

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Summary: Steve's having nightmares, because of course he is. Robin's having nightmares, too, because of course she is. Turns out shared trauma really does bring people closer together.

Shared Trauma Buddies

A/N: originally posted on AO3 on July 10th, 2019. I'm ladybug114 over on AO3, and I'm way more active there, so check me out over there if you like my writing! Anyway, I fell in love with Robin and Steve's friendship in the newest season, and I really needed them to have this conversation. Warning for references to torture, but it's even less explicit than what's in the show. Enjoy, and please leave a review if you like this!

Robin was screaming.

Had been screaming, for God only knows how long.

Steve tried desperately to tune it out, tried desperately not to imagine what she was going through, what *they* were doing to her, but his own injuries made it harder to focus his brain.

And she kept screaming.

"Leave her *alone*," Steve snarled, blood dripping from his nose, but the two guards either couldn't understand him or didn't care. The screams were overwhelming, and Steve's ear was ringing, the pain seemingly catching up to him.

And Robin screamed.

And screamed.

And...

Steve woke up in a cold sweat, sitting straight up in bed, and realized that the telephone was ringing.

Rubbing sleep from his eyes, trying to banish the memory of the dream, Steve stumbled to his feet and toward the sound of the phone, ripping it off the wall more to shut it up than anything else.

"Whoever you are, you better have a damn good reason for waking

me-"

"Steve?"

The quiet voice immediately halted his rant, and Steve stilled, the sounds of a scream still echoing in his brain. "Robin? That you?"

"Yeah," she answered, and Steve could hear the sigh in her voice. "Yeah, Steve, it's me."

His brow furrowed, Steve paused for a moment before saying, "Are you... What do you need?" They were friends now, but it was a friendship born more out of necessity than anything else, and Steve didn't think they were the type of friends who called each other in the middle of the night just to chat.

There was silence for a few moments, and Steve worried for a moment that Robin had just hung up on him, before she answered, "It's. It's nothing. It's stupid. I... I'm sorry for waking you up. You can go back to sleep, I'll... I'll see you later."

"Wait," Steve said quickly, instantly sure that she *was* going to hang up at any moment. "Hey, dude, it's not stupid if you need something."

"I...," Robin started, and then paused. Steve heard her take a deep breath, and then she continued, "Don't be stupid about this, Harrington, but... Are you home alone?"

Steve almost laughed, thinking about how Steve from two years ago would've responded to that particular question, but instead he said, "Yeah. My parents are gone all week, visiting with one of my aunts or something. Why?"

"Can I come over?"

"I mean, yeah," Steve said, rubbing the back of his neck, "but won't your parents be pretty pissed about that? You running off in the middle of the night to some guy's house?"

Robin snorted a short laugh, and Steve could picture her eye roll. "I'm not twelve, Steve, I know how to sneak out. They'll never know I was gone."

There was laughter bubbling up in his chest again, a common byproduct of talking to Robin, but he could also hear a note of tension in Robin's voice, so Steve just asked, "Do you need me to pick you up?"

A pause, as Robin considered. "No," she finally said, "I think the air will be good for me. I'll see you in ten minutes?"

"Yeah," Steve said, but Robin had already hung up. Slowly, he put the phone back, trying to figure out what was happening and trying *desperately* not to panic. If it was something really bad, she would've told him.

If they were back, if the gate was open, she would've told him.

Eight minutes of panicking later, there was a quiet knock at the door.

Steve definitely didn't run to the door, and he definitely pushed it open slowly and calmly.

Standing on the front steps, her arms wrapped around herself and her hair almost covering her face, was Robin.

Steve let out a breath he wasn't even aware he was holding at the sight of her, and did his best to smile. "Hey," he said, stepping back to let her inside.

"Hey," she said, just as quiet as she had been on the phone, and followed him in.

Figuring that going to his bedroom would be a little bit weird, Steve lead her to the living room couch, and they both sat down carefully, looking at each other.

The silence stretched just a little bit too long to be comfortable, before Steve coughed lightly and said, "So, do you want to tell me what's wrong now?"

"Not really," Robin mumbled, not meeting his gaze.

"Great," Steve said, nodding, his mind going a million directions at once. "Great, yeah, okay, sounds good. We can just, um, sit here?"

One corner of Robin's mouth quirked up into a tiny half smile, and Steve counted that a victory.

There was quiet again, and Steve started fidgeting with a pillow, before Robin asked, slow and halted, "Do you... do you ever have, you know, nightmares? About... about everything?"

Steve let himself laugh this time, but there was no humor in it. "My friend, I've been having nightmares for three years."

"Right," Robin said, that small half smile back on her face. "That makes sense. Forgot that you've... well, that you've done this before."

"Yeah, well," Steve said trying to keep his voice casual and relaxed, trying to forget the sounds of screams, "doesn't mean it gets any easier."

Robin hummed in understanding, and then there was quiet again.

"Is that why you called?" Steve finally asked, breaking the silence. "Nightmare?"

"Yeah," Robin practically whispered, her face down again, all traces of smile gone. "We were... we were back *there*, and you..." Abruptly, Robin stopped.

"I what, Robin?"

Robin finally looked up, and Steve could see the beginnings of tears shining in her eyes. "You were dead, Steve."

"Oh," Steve said, quiet, and Robin looked away. It made sense, now, why she had called, why she had come over. She didn't necessarily want to talk, she just needed to check. Needed to be sure that he was still alive. "I dreamed about you tonight, too," Steve suddenly admitted. He hadn't been planning on telling her, but she looked so alone, and he figured that they could bond over this somehow.

"You did?" Robin asked, looking up at him again.

Steve scrubbed a hand over his face, still not quite free from the memories of the dream. "Yeah," he said. "Dreamed that they tortured

you instead of me. I could... I could hear you screaming, but there wasn't anything I could do about it."

"That's what it was for me," Robin said, her eyes flicking up to his face and then away. "Like, what it *really* was. I could hear you shouting, screaming, and my guards didn't tell me anything, and then... and then you stopped screaming."

Steve stayed quiet, listening to her, and knew that this was something she needed to say.

Robin breathed, in and out, in and out, and then continued, her voice thin and panicked, "And then they dragged me to this other room, and threw me on the floor, and then they threw *you* in there, and you weren't saying anything, and you weren't moving, and I couldn't see your face but I could see blood on your clothes. And... and you kept not saying anything, Steve, and I didn't know if you were dead or alive, and I screamed for help because... what else could I do? And, *god*, hearing you tell me to shut up was one of the best moments of my life. But what if you hadn't woken up? You could've... you could've been *dead*, Steve!" Finished, her breath coming in ragged gasps now, Robin dropped her head to her chest. "Sorry," she whispered.

"Don't," Steve said, scooting forward and putting firm hands on her shoulders. "Don't apologize for this, Robin."

Robin, head still down, didn't answer.

"So," Steve said after a moment, his hands still resting on her shoulders, "tonight...?"

Robin sighed, her head, if possible, dropping lower to her chest. "Yeah," she said, and Steve had to strain to hear her. "Tonight, you didn't tell me to shut up. You were just... slumped against my back, totally still, for *ages*. And then they came back in, and they just *laughed*, said it was a pity, and then they... they dragged you away again. And... when I woke up..." she trailed off.

"You weren't sure which version was real," Steve finished. Robin nodded, and Steve squeezed his eyes shut, forcing back memories.

Memories of dreams where he watched Nancy and Jonathan get ripped to shreds in front of him. Dreams where he woke up in the Byers house, the kids gone, and never saw them again. Dreams when the Demadogs broke the bus apart and got to Dustin, to Max, to Lucas, to Mike. Dreams that woke him up with screams on his lips and sweat dripping down his face.

But this wasn't about his dreams, not right now, so Steve opened his eyes again. Acting more on impulse than anything else, he took his arms off of Robin's shoulders and grabbed her hand in one of his, slowly guiding it to rest against his chest, right over his heart. "Feel that?" he asked.

Slowly starting to look up at him again, Robin nodded.

"That's what we call a heartbeat," Steve said, and he could feel the desperate way that Robin was pressing her hand to him. "Want to know something fun about heartbeats?"

To Steve's relief, Robin's mouth turned up into that small half smile again. "What?"

"Dead people don't have them."

Surprised, Robin let out a quick snort of laughter, and Steve found himself grinning at her.

"See?" he said, keeping her hand where it was, feeling suddenly lighter. "I'm right here, and I'm still kicking. Can't get rid of me that easily."

"As hard as I try," Robin muttered, but she was fully smiling now. "Thanks, Steve."

Steve brushed off her thanks, punching her lightly on the shoulder. "Shared trauma buddies have to stick together, right?"

"Shared trauma buddies?" Robin repeated, incredulous.

"Yeah, you know," Steve grinned, sitting back on the couch. "We have shared trauma. Now we're buddies."

Robin raised an eyebrow, but she was smiling now, and Steve was smiling too. "Well then, shared trauma buddy," she said, making Steve laugh, "want to avoid sleep by watching movies all night?"

"Hell yeah I do," Steve answered, and there were no screams echoing in his brain now.